

“Fascists are best when they’re under the ground”

## *Everything Is Great!:* Carsie Blanton and the Burning Hell call for the overthrow of capitalism

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The official celebrations of the 250th anniversary of American independence cannot hide the deep disgust that masses of Americans feel toward the entire political system. In President Donald Trump, many see the embodiment of an oligarchy waging criminal wars, eviscerating democratic rights and engaging in brazen lying and self-enrichment. Expressions of this opposition in popular culture are unfortunately still uncommon.

A noteworthy exception is *Everything Is Great!*, the recent album by singer-songwriter Carsie Blanton and Canadian indie band the Burning Hell. These sharp and funny songs take aim at the financial oligarchy, US imperialism and fascism. They not only call for the overthrow of capitalism but also look forward to a future of peace and equality. This positive attitude provides a welcome contrast with the despair that predominates among those who lean “left,” whether they are artists or not.

Since her debut album *Ain’t So Green* (2005), Blanton, who hails from Luray, Virginia, has steered clear of major labels and remained independent. Folk, country, jazz and Tin Pan Alley have all influenced her music. Some critics have compared Blanton with John Prine and Loudon Wainwright III.

At first, Blanton’s songs largely focused on love and relationships. But since *Buck Up* (2019), which responded to the election of Trump, her work has become more explicitly and consistently political while retaining its humor. Blanton has described herself as a socialist and organized concerts in collaboration with pro-Palestine groups and with the Party for Socialism and Liberation. The latter is a pseudo-left organization that fuses Stalinism and middle-class radicalism, supporting the

trade union bureaucracy and oriented toward pressuring the Democratic Party.

The Burning Hell, which originated in Peterborough, Ontario, is a loose collective centered on Matthias Kom and multi-instrumentalist Ariel Sharratt. Besides being a songwriter, Kom holds a PhD in ethnomusicology. He favors imagined narrators and gentle irony. The group’s songs often deal with work, community and the environment from a nonsystematic, broadly leftist perspective. Like Blanton, the band pursues a do-it-yourself ethic.

The first striking thing about *Everything Is Great!* is its cover, a collage featuring a rogues’ gallery of laughing right-wingers and oligarchs. The crowd includes Jeff Bezos, Marjorie Taylor Greene, Nigel Farage, Javier Milei, Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, General Augusto Pinochet and even Mr. Burns from *The Simpsons*. Meanwhile, war planes soar overhead in a lurid orange sky. The collage recalls the best oppositional traditions of punk album covers and Dada artwork.

Musically, the album ranges between Appalachian folk, country, flamenco, musical theater, rock and educational singalongs in the style of *Schoolhouse Rock!* As interesting as this stylistic diversity is, the focus is always on the vocals and lyrics rather than the arrangements. Many of the band members contribute harmonies or, occasionally, sing lead. Blanton’s vocals are casual yet display conscious technique and phrasing.

The title track begins the album with lazy acoustic guitar strumming as Kom calls Blanton from Canada to make sure she’s okay amid the current political turmoil. With a country lilt, Blanton exhibits forced optimism while acknowledging that “they’re shootin’ people lining

up for bags of flour” and “nobody wants to talk about what you should do if your government is starting World War III.” The song functions as an indictment of the ruling class and a satire of complacent, ineffectual liberals.

But a seriously false note arrives in the line, “Everybody knows Luigi was right.” Luigi Mangione is suspected of the December 2024 murder of Brian Thompson, CEO of UnitedHealthcare. Though this act reflected mass anger at the corporate oligarchy, individual terrorism has no progressive outcome. It not only fails to provide political clarity or leadership but also serves as a pretext for the ruling class to increase repression. It expresses the politics of despair and frustration, not the outlook of a confident, broad-based socialist movement.

Despite such steps backward, the songs on Blanton’s album generally capture, usually in a humorous way, popular anger at war, exploitation and inequality. “Peace and Freedom” mocks official denunciations of political violence (including one by Senator Chuck Schumer) while cataloguing the Tomahawk helicopters, military bases and nuclear weapons at the government’s disposal. “Price of Eggs” satirizes the idea that change can be achieved through elections. Instead, “[We’re] gonna turn the one into the zero percent.”

Especially effective is the spare, minor-keyed “Private Equity,” which describes “A bottomless hunger to monetize / Every second of our previously worthless little lives.” Blanton sings about investors buying nursing homes and cutting the wages of immigrant workers who have fled US-backed coups. Finance capital is “driv[ing] up the price of the housing stock” and “buying the school and the TV show” to convince us that “there’s no point in fighting it.” Blanton draws out the last note of the song with a delicate, sinister curl.

Significantly, the album ends with four songs that strike a sustained note of optimism. The gentle “Live, Laugh, Love” urges, “No matter what anybody tells you, / If we work together, we can overthrow capitalism.” “Minor Characters” imagines an intimate, oceanside celebration after a successful uprising against the police.

The strongest of these final songs is “The War to End All Wars.” Leaning into her Southern accent and singing from a fictional near future, Blanton recalls joining an armed insurrection against Washington. “I try to tell the children, / But they don’t believe a stitch, / How we used to kill and die / To make more profit for the rich.” The album closes with a folk song set in a world at peace. “I’m a weary arms dealer, / And this world ain’t mine no

more,” sings Kom.

From a musical perspective, *Everything Is Great!* is as enjoyable as it is unassuming. The musicians’ nonchalant approach almost obscures the songs’ stylistic diversity. More significant and refreshing is the fact that the musicians (mostly Blanton) address urgent social and political issues directly, intelligently and from an unabashedly left-wing perspective. These songs are pointed and amusing, and many may find them to be a balm during this time of acute crisis.

The album’s humor has its limitations, however. At times it is too gentle, at times too knowing. Blanton and Kom sometimes seem more like preachers before a choir than toughminded social critics. And as welcome as the anticapitalist and antifascist lyrics are, they also raise political questions. The fantasies about disposing of individual CEOs coincide with exhortations to mobilize the working class. At moments, one fears that the musicians’ perspective might not be so far from that of the petty-bourgeois liberals they lampoon.

Notwithstanding these reservations, *Everything Is Great!* says out loud what many Americans are thinking. It is no coincidence that the album has been released at a time of growing opposition to Trump and both political parties. The songs catch the listener’s attention and convince him or her that mass action against capitalism is not only necessary but also eminently possible. Blanton’s own career reflects the process of radicalization that is affecting workers and young people. But these radicalized masses must find their way to the socialist “genuine article.”



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